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ABSTRACT

Effective models for helping adults with disabilities and/or learning difficulties obtain and maintain employment were identified through a research project that included the following activities: collection of background information from 20 providers of support for employment in England and Wales; case studies of a geographically representative sample of 8 of the 20 organizations; and structured interviews with staff from the 8 organizations. The study confirmed that employment and meaningful "work" are key factors in the achievement of adult status by learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. It was concluded that although increasing numbers of people with learning difficulties/disabilities are participating in vocationally based education and training, their opportunities to achieve accreditation have not been matched by opportunities for progression into employment. The following were among the factors identified as key to successful supported employment systems: recognition of adult status; support for client and employer; use of "natural" workplace support; use of job and task analysis; regular review of support; individual approach to clients; high expectations; positive marketing of clients' skills; good job match; partnerships with parents and caregivers; and recognition of service by stakeholders. (Appended are a good practice checklist and list of publications/organizations/agencies providing additional information about supported employment in the United Kingdom.) (MN)

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A real job — with prospects: supported employment opportunities for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities

Maria Hughes and Margaret Kingsford

Volume 1 Number 13

FE MATTERS

FEDA paper

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Photograph credit: Lambeth Accord
From left to right, the photograph shows Errol Philip, catering trainee, Michael Caines, head chef at Gidleigh Park Hotel, Devon, and Max Von Royer, catering trainee.

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Barbara Waters, Skill

Organisations participating in the research project:

Employment Direct
Kite Supported Employment Service
Thingwall Industries Employment and Advisory Service
WISE (Welsh Initiative for Supported Employment)
South Cheshire College
Wakefield College
Wigan and Leigh College
Bournemouth and Poole College of Further Education

and also:

National Development Team

The European Year of Lifelong learning

1996 was designated the European Year of Lifelong Learning by the European Union (EU) to highlight the importance of education and training in Europe's changing society and working environment. While lifelong learning is about everyone, the Year attempted to reach specific groups of people who would particularly benefit from its activities. These included adults, especially older workers, and under-represented groups. It is the needs of these groups in particular that *A real job* seeks to address.

1. Executive summary

Employment and employability are legitimate and achievable aims for people with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Changing roles in work and patterns of employment, advances in technology and higher expectations of people with disabilities and learning difficulties can all help to translate these aims into reality.

The project

This report describes the outcomes of a project which examined effective models of support for assisting adults with learning difficulties and disabilities to obtain and maintain employment. FEDA and the EC jointly funded the project as one of the activities in the European Year of Lifelong Learning.

Adult status

The research reinforced FEDA's emphasis on the achievement of adult status as a legitimate goal for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties. Adult status, as defined by OECD/CEA (1986), is characterised by four main elements:

- personal autonomy and independence
- economic self sufficiency
- a range of roles within the family
- participation in the community

Employment and meaningful 'work' are key factors that relate to this goal. Different agencies recognise the concept of adult status and it is a useful notion with which to promote shared activities leading to employment opportunities.

Vocational education and training

More and more people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been doing vocationally based education and training in recent years. Nationally recognised accreditation is widely offered by those providing the training. Where possible, FE establishments and training providers have ensured that learners work towards a range of qualifications including National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). People with learning difficulties, having gained access to training opportunities and qualifications, now expect to enter the labour market. but recent FEDA research has demonstrated that opportunities to achieve accreditation are not matched by opportunities for progression into employment.

Key factors in successful supported employment systems

- recognition of adult status
- support for client and employer
- use of 'natural' workplace support
- use of job and task analysis
- regular review of support
- individual approach to clients
- integrity and honesty
- clear roles and responsibilities
- high expectations
- positive marketing of clients' skills
- good job match
- partnerships with parents and carers
- recognition of service by stakeholders

A real job describes the current state of provision and suggests factors which support the progression of adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into employment. Particular emphasis is placed on models that lead into open, rather than sheltered, employment. It should be of interest to providers of education and guidance in the FE sector, voluntary agencies, learners and their carers.

2. Background

While great strides have been made in developing provision for education and training for people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties much work needs to be done to promote progression to employment. This lack of progression is often due to the negative attitudes of employers and employees rather than the lack of jobs available or the suitability of the person.

Many people with a range of disabilities and learning difficulties obtain and hold down jobs of all descriptions without onerous special arrangements or adaptations. Changing patterns of work, such as home working and developments in technology have removed some of the physical barriers to employment for people with disabilities. Greater expectations of people with disabilities and learning difficulties need to be matched by more positive attitudes on the part of employers and society in general if entitlement to jobs and appropriate support is to become the norm and not the exception.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is also a potentially helpful factor in promoting the employment rights of people with disabilities. Among other things the Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against people with disabilities in connection with employment. It will create new duties in relation to education and new standards of access affecting public transport.

What is supported employment?

Supported employment for people with learning difficulties and disabilities is a relatively new concept that developed, mainly in the USA, in the late 1970s. Mencap's Pathway Project led the development of this provision in Britain and many of the examples identified by the FEDA investigation were influenced by this work.

The Department of Health established a National Development Team (NDT) in 1976 with a remit to examine services for people with learning difficulties. The earliest supported employment schemes in the UK were established around 1984. In 1990 the 'Real Jobs Initiative' project was set up by the National Development Team, Training in Systematic Instruction' (TSI) Ltd and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to help people with learning difficulties into employment. As part of this project they established a national database of supported employment schemes which was the first of its kind in the UK.

There are various definitions of supported employment. This project and report use the definition adopted by the NDT and the Association for Supported Employment (AFSE)[1] which emphasises that the employment should be:

- paid
- undertaken in an integrated setting
- involve the same variety of work that is available to non-disabled people.

The support provided should be flexible and varied with a long-term commitment to its continuance.

Key issues in supported employment

The NDT mapped supported employment provision as part of the Real Jobs Initiative between 1990-2. A 1995 survey in the North West indicated that:

- supported employment is a practical, attainable and valued option which can compete with traditional day services in terms of quality and cost
- demand exceeds supply and more people want support to obtain jobs than the existing services can support
- underfunding, and the resulting lack of resources, is the most serious problem
- availability of jobs and clients' ability to obtain and keep them are not major problems when appropriate support is provided
- remaining difficulties include:
  - —the benefit trap
  - —lack of support from other service staff and families
  - —low expectations of potential workers

—low pay and part time culture in some supported employment services

— absence of supported employment in some areas and limited provision in others[1]

Significant regional variation in the level of provision of supported employment is still evident. For example, there are many supported employment agencies in Liverpool, which may be expected in a large inner city area, but not a corresponding number in other major cities such as Manchester, Leeds, or Birmingham. The location of supported agencies appears to be based on chance and factors such as previous designation as an area of deprivation where extra funding from a variety of sources became available.

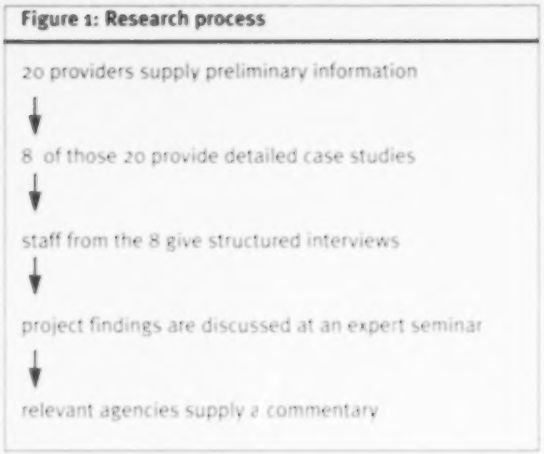
The project

Twenty providers of support for employment in England and Wales were initially contacted and asked to provide background information. They included further education (FE) colleges and supported employment agencies that were either independent or attached to larger services such as county councils or day centres. They contributed information which defined the parameters of the investigation.

Eight organisations were asked to participate more actively in the project. This sample ensured a spread across geographical area, the client group of the organisation to include people with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health problems, etc., the FE and voluntary sectors, and social services. Some were engaged in partnership ventures. Structured interviews were undertaken with staff from these organisations against a good practice checklist (see Appendix A).

The project findings were then commented on and discussed at an expert seminar. the views of agencies with an interest in this area of work were also sought.

Figure 1: Research process


20 providers supply preliminary information
8 of those 20 provide detailed case studies
staff from the 8 give structured interviews
project findings are discussed at an expert seminar
relevant agencies supply a commentary

3. Supported employment in action

A range of services is available from the public and private sector to help people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties to gain and maintain employment.

The employment service

Within the employment service, Placement, Assessment and Counselling Teams (PACTs) — formed after the reorganisation of the Disability Advisory Service and Employment Rehabilitation Centres — help people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties to get and hold employment. PACTs are responsible for the three main schemes available for people with disabilities and learning difficulties: Access to Work, Supported Employment and workshop provision.

Access to Work

Access to Work is a flexible service designed to enable individuals to enter open employment. Up to £21,000 is available over a period of five years and can be used for fares to work, adaptation of premises and personal support services. Those seeking this funding must work more than eight hours per week and must be capable of performing 80% of the tasks. Employers can claim compensation for the remaining parts of the job that the person cannot do. Beneficiaries must be registered unemployed and be eligible for PACT support (i.e. disability lasts more than one year). The Access to Work scheme is not intended to provide long-term support.

Supported employment

Supported Employment, formerly the Sheltered Placement Scheme, is a wage subsidy for employers who appoint staff with disabilities. PACT staff assess the productivity of the worker which determines the size of the subsidy.

Workshop provision

Workshops, formerly the Sheltered Workshop Scheme, offers 'supported employment' under the direction of the supported employment procurement and consultancy service (SEPACs). Greater emphasis is now placed on helping employees move out into open employment.

PACT staff in job centres refer potential beneficiaries to all of these schemes. PACTs can contract out to supported employment agencies to provide opportunities for rehabilitation into jobs. Long term support, however, is not provided by the employment service.

Supported employment agencies

Many employment agencies from the voluntary and private sector provide a dedicated service to support clients into employment. They provide support for the client and for the employer. The particular needs of clients vary but all would have difficulty in gaining and holding on to any kind of employment without assistance. These organisations work with clients with moderate and severe learning difficulties and some also cater for clients with medical conditions such as head injuries, Alzheimer's disease, mental health problems and physical disabilities.

The Kite-supported Employment Service has been actively involved in developing a rehabilitation project with West Kent PACT, using the model of supported employment. This involved placing those disabled people on work placements directly relevant to their desired jobs, and providing whatever support has been necessary. After a year, this has proved a great success with well over 50% of those referred going on to open employment. Many of these people had been with at least one of the more traditional service providers before and failed to find employment. The figures rise to 95% success for those who lasted the whole length of the programme.

This approach contrasts with other provision where training may be provided in a segregated environment in the skills which are available, rather than those required in real jobs.

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FE colleges and supported employment

FE colleges are becoming increasingly concerned at the lack of progression opportunities for their students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Bournemouth and Poole College and Wigan and Leigh College

Bournemouth and Poole and Wigan and Leigh Colleges were also concerned at the 'black hole' down which students disappeared at the end of the course. Wigan and Leigh College was aware that their students progressing onto Youth Training courses three years ago were not succeeding and wanted to return to college for part-time courses without necessarily having long term goals in mind.

As a result, some have become involved in supported employment initiatives. Colleges contributing to the project identified the need for positive transition from education and training to work.

Wakefield College

Wakefield College reported that, before becoming involved in supported employment of 35 students in the cohort who progressed on to Training for Work or Employment Training, only two lasted the whole year and none got a job! Instead, all came back to college over the course of the year. Since the establishment of their supported employment initiative — in which the college team identify prospective employers and then negotiate financial subsidies, review procedures, specialist support and employment — two thirds of leavers connected with this project are securing open employment.

South Cheshire College

South Cheshire was involved in a collaborative project which enabled the college to offer real work experience with support to students on discrete courses for students with learning difficulties. Students can only move to supported employment via a referral from a social worker. Practitioners at South Cheshire College would like to expand their range of vocational options so that students can choose vocational courses to match their job aspirations.

4. Creating successful supported employment systems

A common philosophy and methodology

The colleges and supported employment agencies share the same philosophy based on the notion of adult status. They all believe that people with learning difficulties should have opportunities to experience normal patterns of life, including going to work. Those interviewed were specifically concerned with securing open employment and several explicitly stated this in their publicity and marketing information.

The process

The process of establishing and maintaining supported employment was similar in all the participating organisations.

Figure 2: Typical stages in creating supported employment

1. referral
2. initial meeting with the client
3. vocational profiling
4. work tasters or sampling
5. job search
6. job analysis
7. support on the job
8. ongoing support

1. Referral

A social worker generally initiates referral, although some services may accept self-referrals.

This could make it difficult for individuals who may need to be redirected to social services or the employment service.

2. Initial meeting with the client

This involves:

- clarifying the nature of the service
- explaining what the client can expect and what the service expects

All organisations emphasised the importance of spending time at this stage to ensure that the client and, where appropriate, their family or carers, understand the implications of working.

Unfortunately, on completion of this stage the client may be put on a waiting list of up to one year.

3. Vocational profiling

An employment consultant or job development officer completes an in-depth vocational profile to assess the clients' skills, abilities and interests.

Vocational profiling may take several months to complete.

4. Work tasters or sampling

The purpose of work sampling is to achieve the right match between the skills of the individual and the requirements of the job. It can give the job trainer valuable information about how the person performs in a particular role. It also gives the client the opportunity to experience particular jobs and to decide whether this is what he or she really wants.

This should not be confused with work experience. Both the national survey and the 1995 North West survey found that few people graduate from work experience into paid work.

5. Job search

The emphasis is on selling the person to the company, rather than making a special case for the client. It is important that the agency is able to speak authoritatively to employers about the contribution the prospective employee could make to their company.

6. Job analysis

When a client has been accepted for employment the job is analysed. Before the client starts work a support and training plan is agreed with the employer. This may include disability awareness training for fellow workers.

7. Support on the job

Initially, this may be full support but is reduced as the employee becomes competent and confident. Task analysis is undertaken and systematic instruction given to the employee.

8. Ongoing support

Both employers and all their employees, including the person with learning difficulties and disabilities, may require support once employment is established. Contact with the employer is maintained — although the level and frequency vary and may be minimal. Some agencies place greater emphasis on networking with employer groups.

The client may also need retraining if the demands of the job change or if the client needs to change their job.

The process does not always follow the stages as smoothly as it appears. Clients may need to move back and forth at some points, for example, if they receive work tasters in more than one area or if the job match does not work. *(See the flowchart on page 12).*

The client's disability is never a starting point when canvassing employers. The emphasis is on giving employers the opportunity to employ people who are skilled, motivated, trained and supported.

The enthusiasm and expertise of the staff doing this work are central to its success. All the agencies employed a range of staff including a director or co-ordinator, job development officers, employment support officers or employment consultants and job trainers or job coaches. Job titles varied but the roles within agencies were very similar.

The employment consultant, job development officer or employment support officer canvass employers and identify job matches. They sort out any issues around benefits, conduct the initial guidance with the client, negotiate the wage with the employer and support the employer once they have established the client. The job coach, or job trainer, undertakes task analysis and supports the client in the workplace.

Client groups

A wide range of clients may require support to gain and hold down a job. Their needs vary according to individual circumstances and provision reflects this. Clients often need support not only to learn job-related skills but to adapt to the workplace. Many will never have experienced a work environment. Some may have completed work awareness training but often require support to transfer this to their own workplace.

The findings of the FEFC Committee on Disability and/or Learning Difficulties have highlighted the differences in the needs of young adults and older clients, reflecting their different life experiences. Many of the older group may have been in long-stay institutions and need more help and time in recognising their adult status in the initial stages of the process. Younger adults with learning difficulties may take longer to achieve adult status than their peers, but it should be viewed as an achievable goal and once they are employed, their workmates must be encouraged to support and reinforce this status.

Equally, people with physical disabilities have widely differing needs depending on many factors, such as the nature of the disability and how recently they have become disabled.

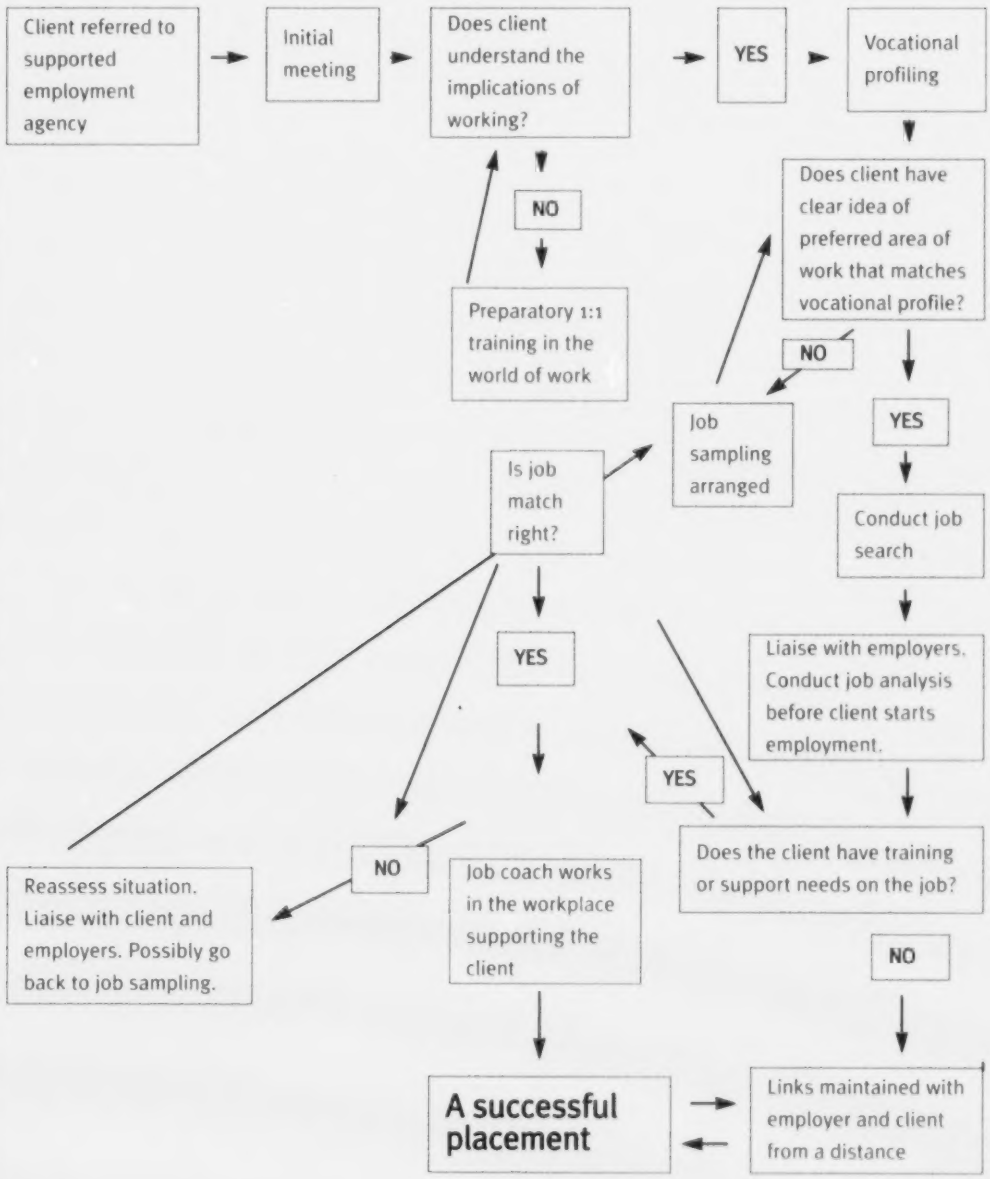
Some supported employment agencies worked with clients with medical conditions that affected their ability to gain employment.

KITE Employment Services receive joint funding from health and social services to work with people with head injuries. Last year they extended this to people with Alzheimer's disease and job coaches receive specialist training to work with dementia.

Wakefield College

Wakefield College decided to concentrate on those who were least well served in the community, i.e. those with severe learning difficulties and mental health problems. Age was not a barrier.

Figure 3: Typical stages in establishing supported employment


Client referred to supported employment agency
Initial meeting
Does client understand the implications of working?
YES
Vocational profiling
NO
Preparatory 1:1 training in the world of work
Does client have clear idea of preferred area of work that matches vocational profile?
NO
YES
Job sampling arranged
Is job match right?
Conduct job search
YES
Liaise with employers. Conduct job analysis before client starts employment.
YES
NO
Reassess situation. Liaise with client and employers. Possibly go back to job sampling.
Job coach works in the workplace supporting the client
Does the client have training or support needs on the job?
NO
A successful placement
Links maintained with employer and client from a distance

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The colleges were keen to ensure that students who had taken part in vocational training strengthened the link between practising skills and using them in work situations while waiting to gain employment.

Bournemouth and Poole College

Bournemouth and Poole College received referrals directly from the employment service and worked with these clients on a short term basis. This could involve supported job searches, tasters in college or in work, interview practice, depending on the client's action plan.

Current 16-19 year olds with learning difficulties all have a work placement which, if it is successful, they can convert into employment. If students are not placed at the end of their programme, they can attend a summer job club which is run by the work experience co-ordinator. If a student then needs to link into the rehabilitation service this is done through a referral to the college via the Disability Employment Agency [DEA].

Support in employment

There is an expectation that clients will eventually be able to work without support. Some employees, however, will always require support for all or parts of their job.

One man was successfully employed as a groundsman but required support to use a strimmer. When this arose, the company phoned the supported employment agency and a job coach was provided for that particular task.

Support for the employee may be indirect. They may need additional support, for instance, to get to and from work, to clarify benefit entitlements and facilitate liaison with other agencies. Providers of support for employment place great emphasis on the use of natural support in the workplace — where a colleague or workmate takes on a mentoring and support role — and on disability awareness work with the client's colleagues.

Families and carers may require support to come to terms with the individual's desire for work. Supporting parents and carers to 'let go' was seen as part of the agencies' roles in the initial stages of the process. All felt that acknowledging the part that parents and carers had played in the lives of the person until this point was important and recognise the complexities of the parent/child relationship when the child had additional difficulties.

***Wakefield College** have produced a video called 'Letting Go' aimed at parents and carers of people with learning difficulties.*

Support for employers

This is a crucial part of the supported employment process. Very often the client is undertaking the job successfully and it is the employer who requires support.

A man had been working for two years in a catering firm and had become confident and competent at his job. At this stage the manager left and his replacement felt very uneasy about working with someone with learning difficulties. The job coach stayed on to support the employer, as lack of support at this stage might have jeopardised the client's employment.

Support continues once the client is established in employment. This is often no more than a phone call once a month to check that all is well, but it can involve re-training if the job changes.

Supported employment agencies felt that funding bodies did not recognise that clients and their employers require long term support and monitoring. Often it is because employers feel supported that they are prepared to take what they perceive as the risk of employing someone with a disability.

As well as direct contact with employers about their employees, many agencies were involved in general awareness raising.

Wigan and Leigh College

It is important to engage employers in dialogue and maintain positive relationships with the local business community to exchange ideas and informatic The Pathways Employment Scheme at Wigan and Leigh College has taken up invitations to make presentations at the Rotary Club, Chambers of Commerce and other business groups.

Supported employment agencies need to be aware of local employment opportunities. Networking with other regional supported employment agencies and involving themselves in business and commercial groups assist this. The jobs clients have obtained are as varied as the individuals seeking work. It is important to avoid stereotyping certain jobs as suitable. One man with an interest in reptiles worked in a zoo. He used a wheelchair but they had already adapted the zoo for disabled visitors. Another client with good interpersonal skills worked as a marshall at a golf course.

It is vitally important to take advantage of any opportunities to raise employer awareness of the part they may play in supporting employment. Using those already involved to canvas their peers may be especially effective.

Employment Direct

Employment Direct had an annual business training day where employers who are already involved in supported employment can meet other employers who may be interested.

5. Other major issues surrounding supported employment

Access

Although a range of support is available, getting access to it is not straightforward. Referral is largely through an intermediary or agency as not all supported employment providers are sufficiently resourced for an open door policy. The client group may be stipulated by the funder. Where funding is obtained from social services, referral is normally through a social worker. This causes some concern for agencies and colleges who recognise that some people, for whatever reason, are reluctant to make contact with social workers.

All the agencies had waiting lists and were unable to cope with the demand. They were also concerned at the considerable number of people who were not judged to have sufficient learning difficulties but who would nevertheless have benefited from some initial support into employment.

The number of clients placed in any one year varied. Some examples are listed below:

Provider	Clients place in one year
College A	average 4-5 clients per week through the rehabilitation scheme place approximately 140 students in work placement each year
College B	15 students placed successfully per year in employment
Agency A	30 clients on the waiting list 35 actively seeking work 200+ in employment
Agency B	many clients are established in work and have maintained jobs independently for more than three years 88 clients have been involved in the pre-employment course
Agency C	has 160 clients plus 30 on a waiting list receives 10-50 referrals per year

Some colleges and supported employment agencies reported the temptation in their early days to fill vacancies with their clients because jobs were available. They learned by experience that it was vital to secure a job that matched the clients' skills to ensure long-term employment.

At every stage the client is treated as an individual. This is crucial but may not be recognised by funding agencies. It can be very difficult to predict how long it will take for a client to be established in an employment situation. All the organisations were aware of this and resisted the temptation to hurry the process to meet external targets.

Training for work

All the organisations interviewed offered training to clients in either the form of preparation for work courses or specific training related to particular jobs.

The colleges interviewed were keen to work closely with external supported employment agencies to meet any training needs that the agency might have identified.

> *One woman was completing her Basic Food Hygiene Certificate at the local college before employment in the catering business.*

The benefits of specific work preparation courses are not always direct. Skills taught in a different context may need to be reinforced in a work setting. Courses often aim to make people 'ready for work' but those interviewed were wary of this term and felt that there was no substitute for on-the-job training. Work preparation courses are useful as part of initial profiling and where there are long waiting lists.

Thingwalls Industries

Thingwall Industries are involved in research examining 18 people in the pre-employment stage, 12 of whom have completed a work preparation course and six who have not. The research will identify any differences between the two groups in terms of employability.

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Kite Employment Service

KITE used to provide work preparation courses, but although the courses were successful, they felt that teaching about work in a college or classroom environment may not be helpful as skills had to be relearned in specific work situations. This proved to be particularly a problem for people with learning difficulties.

WISE

WISE commissioned some research with Swansea University, to identify the qualities and skills employers look for in employees. Employers gave a low score to literacy, numeracy and ability to complete a task but a high score to general transferable skills such as health and safety awareness, personal presentation, timekeeping and interpersonal skills.

In response to this, WISE developed a short modular course to develop these general transferable skills.

Partnerships

Partnership arrangements between complementary services may nevertheless result in better use of existing opportunities.

South Cheshire College

South Cheshire College established close links with Cheshire County Council's supported employment provision as part of an European Social Fund (ESF) funded project. The supported employment service completed a vocational profile for learners with disabilities or learning difficulties on college courses. Job coaches and transport were provided while the learner was on work placement. As a result the college would like to develop further links with Cheshire County Council Supported Employment to enable students to progress on to supported employment after they have completed their college courses

Bournemouth and Poole College

Bournemouth and Poole College has established a local group made up of the careers service, the local TEC, the Health Authority, Social Services, voluntary agencies, adult education, private organisations and the probation service. Their remit was to look at the education and training needs and support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in South East Dorset.

Maxims

Maxims was established in the Liverpool area, which has one of the highest incidences of supported employment agencies in the country, to act as a brokerage service for the two main purchasers of supported employment services (Liverpool City Council and the Health Authority) and the providers of supported employment. It was funded jointly by Liverpool County Council, Liverpool Health Authority, Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council on a two year basis.

Training for providers of support

Training for employers may involve disability awareness training, the development of natural support in the workplace, and individualised training on employer's premises. Many supported employment agencies and college staff receive training in Systematic Instruction and learn how to complete job and task analysis. Several of those interviewed also stressed the importance of some marketing training and an up-to-date knowledge of the benefits system.

There is a gap in the training and qualifications available for staff involved in supported employment which is beginning to be addressed. Courses are being developed that are specially geared towards those involved in supporting employment.

Bournemouth and Poole College

Bournemouth and Poole College has developed a job coaching course to train staff supporting people with disabilities into employment. It is a direct response to policy developments within Social Services and Employment Services that reflect the principles of supported employment. Bournemouth and Poole are seeking external accreditation for this course which includes lectures and workshops on the supported employment model, vocational profiling, job coaching, employer/employee relationships and the use of natural support. Students are required to have a placement of a minimum of eight hours per week so that they can relate assignments to practice.

South Cheshire College

South Cheshire College is currently discussing offering Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) assessment for job coaches and vocational training where required.

A diploma in Supported Employment is currently being piloted. This is a distance learning package with workshop support accredited by the University of Oxford Delegacy of local examinations. At the time of writing there are eight accredited centres in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. A team of writers with acknowledged expertise in the field of supported employment has developed open learning packs.

The Diploma focuses on developing staff competencies and includes an assessed, quality improvement programme in the student's own workplace (see Appendix B).

Funding

Resourcing issues were the main concern of all the organisations interviewed and securing funding took up a disproportionate amount of time of key staff within each organisation. The success of supported employment providers appeared to depend as much on their skills in fund-raising, as on the quality of their support for clients and employers.

Each college had, at least initially, received European Social Funding. Some had been able to secure funding from other external sources to embed the support systems into the college structure.

Bournemouth and Poole College

Bournemouth and Poole College received funding from the Employment Service for a rehabilitation contract which enabled them to offer interviews to clients to establish the kind of job they wanted, supported job searches, placements in work, tasters in college and support from job coaches in work.

Wakefield College

Wakefield College is funded partly through Social Services for their supported employment work. It has also established a partnership with Real Life Options, a voluntary agency, which employs a supported employment advocate to help employers and students once they are established in employment and have left college.

Wigan and Leigh College

The Pathway Employment Scheme is an independent service at Wigan and Leigh College. It is funded through a variety of sources including Urban Programme, City Challenge, Social Services and DSS and have submitted bids for a share of the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and Millennium money.

Where colleges provided work placement support for students on FEFC-funded courses, they had secured funding from additional support units. They were concerned, however, that the FEFC did not recognise employment as a successful outcome or evidence of progression.

Supported employment agencies obtained funding from a range of sources including social services, the health service, local Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), European Social Funding, the Single Regeneration Budget, the employment service, local county councils, private sponsorship, Barnados and the national lottery.

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Supported employment agencies were resourceful and imaginative when it came to funding issues.

WISE

WISE developed a 'Natural Supports Project' in which the Practical Aids Support Fund funded 50% of the project and was matched by sponsorship from employers. With the money raised WISE ran a course on Systematic Instruction for 12 employers who received the course free but were asked to pledge work or placements and agree to provide support. This enabled WISE to generate vacancies where a greater degree of natural support was available while at the same time providing employers with training.

Funding tends to be short term and is often linked to particular client groups. If an agency has attracted private sponsorship, they may have their core funding reduced. Such an approach not only restricts the longer term planning and development of the service but also perpetuates the 'special' nature of the provision and of the clients.

Fundholders are often required to do more than provide supported employment services. For example, social services contracts sometimes involve schools, work projects, consultations with day centres, staff development and updates with community service teams, and the development of community projects, as well as supported employment services.

Contribution to the economy

The fact that all the agencies had some clients who had been in paid employment for several years demonstrates the ability of people with learning difficulties to hold down jobs and become valuable members of the workforce.

However, most of the clients referred to supported employment agencies receive benefits. Many fall into the benefit trap where the present system is a disincentive to work. This is a risk that many people are not prepared to take. Some of those working in this area considered that a significant number of their clients would always require top-up benefits. This makes the economic contribution they were making to society difficult to quantify. However, the difference that involvement in society through work makes to self esteem and positive well-being, often reduces take-up of other costly services, such as day care or health service provision.

6. Extending the provision

The demand for supported employment is considerable and is increasing as people with disabilities and learning difficulties gain vocational qualifications and want to use their newly acquired skills. If supported employment is to become a natural progression from education and training, it needs to fall in step with notions of inclusivity as promoted by the FEFC's *Inclusive Learning* report. In addition to the undoubted need for specialist expertise and services, this may require greater involvement of the regular sources of support for employment which are provided for non-disabled people.

A wider range of clients

Many students who have attended special schools have mild learning difficulties and would not necessarily fall into the client group of most supported employment agencies. While great progress has been made in addressing the needs of the group for whom access to work is most difficult, a large group of people in the community could also access work given minimal support.

Maxims' 'fast track service'

Maxims have also established a 'fast track' employment service for those who require minimum support. This group are often under represented, as supported employment agencies have tended to concentrate on clients with moderate to severe learning difficulties.

In a recent survey of 24 supported employment agencies in the North West, the level of learning disability of clients spanned the following range:

Level of learning disability	***No. of clients***	***%***
Borderline	*8*	*2*
Mild	*40*	*9*
Moderate	*195*	*45*
Severe	*168*	*38*
Profound	*25*	*6*
Total	***437***	***100***

Recommendations

In many areas of the country this provision is still underdeveloped.There is also no single body responsible for initiating or co-ordinating the service.

1. An independent advocacy service for use by the client and a body that pulled together the many different strands of provision would be a major step forward.
2. The **Careers Service** could play a greater part in the process, although this would obviously require more substantial coverage of the issues relating to working with people with learning difficulties in pre-service and in-service training.
3. The **TECs** also have a role in promoting training and enterprise opportunities and may be valuable sources of labour market information for those involved in supported employment. They could - and, in some areas, are - promoting positive attitudes among employers to people with disabilities and learning difficulties. Given the TECs' emphasis on getting a job as a positive outcome of training, they could be valuable champions of supported employment.
4. **FE colleges** could explore the potential for partnership arrangements although full supported employment services are perhaps beyond the colleges' remit.
5. **FEFC(E)** could promote this progression by viewing it as a positive achievement. Funding progression to employment as a successful outcome of college provision would greatly promote the development of such progression routes.

7. Conclusions

An important role for colleges

Transition from colleges to work will be improved by more collaboration between local agencies, the careers service and TECs and employers. FE colleges play a valuable role in transition to work and should link with supported employment agencies before students leave college. It is important that supported employment is on the agenda when discussing the next stage in the student's career. The learning programme should reflect the preparation for work. For instance, the initial interview and vocational profiling could be carried out while the student is still at college, thus securing progression into supported employment without a gap.

Creating connections

If good links are established with supported employment agencies colleges can be the first point of contact when clients require further training. Colleges should, therefore:

- build up a picture of local provision
- join any networks that exist or establish a network that involves careers, TECs, social services, health services, supported employment agencies and special schools
- establish early links with supported employment agencies for individual students
- offer work preparation accreditation to students with learning difficulties
- offer vocational training in real working environments

The increasing number of adults with disabilities and learning difficulties seeking and successfully gaining employment challenges many assumptions and adds a further dimension to the quest for progression for such learners. There are clearly issues and concerns to be addressed — not least the need for resources to secure high quality supported employment across the whole country.

However, while acknowledging the need for extra support, in the context of regular provision it is important for practice to move from the margins and influence regular provision. The important challenge to providers of education, training and careers guidance is to promote a change of attitude amongst employers and carers. Partnerships between the key players — with perhaps an identified lead agent — are vital to ensure that those who wish to progress to employment are supported to do so.

Equally, while high expectations of people with disabilities and learning difficulties must be maintained, a sensible approach taken to the expected financial returns on this activity is needed. This will inevitably vary according to individual circumstances. Financial disincentives should be reviewed to ensure there is a net gain to the individual, the family or carers and society in general.

Appendix A: Good practice checklist

The research project identified examples of good practice on the basis of the following criteria:

Supported employment should:

- work to the principle of adult status
- tailor support to meet individuals' needs
- develop and maintain effective links with families and carers
- inform clients about the implications of working and effects on benefits
- include:
  - —vocational assessment followed by job-tasters and job matching
  - —initial and on-going training
  - —job analysis
- involve effective liaison with employers
- provide support for employers as well as for the client
- provide an effective follow-up service, including ongoing support for employers and employees
- develop natural support in the workplace
- be adequately funded to provide appropriate support
- involve effective liaison with other relevant agencies to secure a co-ordinated approach

Key factors

Successful supported employment systems depend upon the following key factors:

- a recognition and understanding of adult status
- high expectations of the clients
- an approach that takes into account the individual needs of the client
- integrity and honesty in what is offered and delivered
- an awareness of implications of work and benefits
- partnerships with parents and carers
- recognition of the service by stakeholders
- clearly identified roles and responsibilities
- time spent on the initial stages and vocational profile to ensure a good job match
- use of job and task analysis
- a professional approach to marketing clients to employers
- support for both the client and the employer
- use of natural support in the workplace
- regular review in level of support required

Appendix B: Further information

References

[1] Systematic Instruction is where tasks are broken down into smaller steps, which helps people with learning difficulties learn marketable skills

[2]The Association for Supported Employment (AFSE, formerly ASEA — Association of Supported Employment Agencies) has, since 1991, been developing the concept of supported employment in the UK It is now an established network which provides a quarterly newsletter, a comprehensive skills and resources register, local forums and regional and national training events.

[3]Taken from: North West Training and Development Team publication: see bibliography

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3. Association for Supported Employment (AFSE)
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4. 'Housing through Work'
is a Joseph Rowntree Foundation Project, looking at provision for adults with learning difficulties in a variety of settings. The project team has visited places as diverse as a snail farm in France and a mountain bike shop in Oxford.
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